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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [YU](#) [KO](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: GOS KOSOVO RHETORIC: MORE SOUND THAN FURY

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Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) Summary and comment. Although the general reaction among most Slovak politicians, media and the public to Kosovo's declaration of independence has been relatively restrained, top officials from governing coalition parties, including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister Caplovic, and Jan Slota have made publicly critical comments. Slota, the boorish leader of the Slovak National Party (SNS) claimed that the U.S. seeks to destabilize the EU through its Kosovo policy and that recognition could lead to a "third World War." Ambassador Obsitnik and A/DCM reached out on February 22 to officials in the offices of the PM and the President, and to a leading SMER MP, to express concern about Slota's statements and to urge that PM Fico distance himself from such inflammatory rhetoric. (Note: Post's efforts to contact the SNS spokesman were unsuccessful.)

¶2. (C) Summary Cont. In a February 24 appearance on Slovak television, PM Fico condemned the attacks in Belgrade against the U.S. and other embassies, but, asked to comment on Slota's provocative statements, said only that he would have chosen different words. The Prime Minister stated that Kosovo's declaration of independence violated international law and set a dangerous precedent, adding that Slovakia "might never" recognize Kosovo. While we do not believe that Fico's troubling and, at times, provocative rhetoric signals a material shift in the GOS position, it could complicate an eventual course correction. Ambassador Obsitnik will meet with FM Kubis on February 26 to seek clarification, as well as to underscore U.S. disappointment regarding PM Fico's own comments and his failure to repudiate Slota. We also are seeking to reschedule the Ambassador's one-on-one meeting with the Prime Minister (canceled due to the PM's recent illness) as soon as possible. End summary and comment.

After MFA's Relative Nuance, a Predictably Negative Chorus

¶3. (SBU) On February 17 the MFA issued a statement noting that "for the time being" Slovakia will not recognize Kosovo "on the basis of this declaration..." but will "closely follow the development of the situation in Kosovo and the region, as well as the steps of the international community. Only after evaluating the situation will Slovakia decide on further steps." In a subsequent press conference, Foreign Minister Kubis studiously avoided going beyond the parameters

of the statement when reporters pressed for clarification regarding if, when, or on what basis Slovakia might decide to recognize Kosovo. In a joint press conference on February 20 with visiting Russian Deputy Prime Minister Naryskin, PM Fico took a less nuanced stance, calling Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence a mistake. Fico said that Slovakia would not recognize Kosovo until there is a change in its status that accords with international law. Fico said the UN Security Council should adopt a solution and the EU should continue to work towards a common position.

14. (SBU) Also on February 20, Deputy PM Dusan Caplovic stated that he "would never vote for Kosovo's independence," adding that "we know very well from whence drugs, white meat (trafficked persons) and weapons flow into Europe." On February 21, SNS leader Jan Slota said "the Kosovo problem is really a precedence of the sort that could lead to a third World War... We're not talking about democracy, we're not talking about law... This is simply the Munich Dictate, which can now be called the Washington Dictate." Slota added that the U.S. also supports Kosovo's independence because it has a secret prison there, similar to Guantanamo, and to further

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its missile defense plans.

15. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik, who was on travel in eastern Slovakia, and A/DCM contacted government officials and politicians on February 22 to express extreme disappointment with Jan Slota's statements and to urge that the Prime Minister disassociate himself from such rhetoric. Smer MP and head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Boris Zala, initially sought to minimize the import of Slota's comments, but appeared to accept the Ambassador's argument that statements by Slota reflect badly on the government. He

BRATISLAVA 00000083 002 OF 002

expressed a willingness to speak to the Prime Minister about this issue. President Gasparovic's diplomatic advisor, Jan Foltin, told A/DCM that Gasparovic had canceled plans for a joint television appearance with the Prime Minister to discuss Kosovo, in order to signal his "more reserved" position on the issue. A/DCM urged Foltin to convey to the President our concerns about the tenor of the rhetoric, particularly in light of the previous day's violence in Belgrade.

Fico on Recognition: Maybe Never

16. (SBU) During his February 24 appearance on news program, PM Fico's comments were not inconsistent with previous public remarks he has made on Kosovo. During a December 4 visit to Brussels, for instance, Fico stated that "we want to be very cooperative when it comes to this issue, but I can hardly see us recognizing a Kosovo that had declared itself unilaterally independent." The interview was, however, the most wide-ranging Fico has given on Kosovo and the conclusions and connections he drew -- or declined to draw -- were troubling. Fico characterized Kosovo's declaration and subsequent recognition by some states as a dangerous precedent in violation of international law.

7.(SBU) The Prime Minister made an analogy between the actions of the Kosovar Albanians to a hypothetical call by Slovakia's Hungarian minority for independence and used a reported statement by the Chairman of the Hungarian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Zsolt Nemeth, to bolster his example. Fico quoted Nemeth as saying that "social and territorial autonomy is the best way of solving ethnic issues in Central Europe. The fact that the autonomy of Kosovo has been supported by the international community, is good news for minorities in the region." When the reporter pushed back on the merits of a comparison between Kosovo and Slovakia, Fico replied that he merely wanted viewers to

understand the situation.

18. (SBU) Fico said that it was unfortunate that the EU was once again divided over a question of international law, as had been the case with respect to the Iraq war. Asked to respond to Russian Ambassador Rogozin's comments about use of force in Kosovo, Fico said that he did not believe such a thing would happen in Europe, adding: "I am not here to evaluate either the U.S. or the Russians, but I want to say that someone has created this situation...So, it should not have happened (Kosovo secession), and then we would not have here these tough statements." Fico noted that despite Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO, it did not intend to pursue a foreign policy that was oriented only toward the U.S. Asked whether his remarks were at odds with the February 17 MFA statement noting that Slovakia would re-evaluate the situation in Kosovo in 120 days, Fico said categorically "no," explaining that what Kubis was referring to "was the period in which international organizations would be transferring certain responsibilities to local bodies."

19. (C) Comment and conclusion: During a February 19 courtesy call on Pavol Demes, Director of the German Marshall Foundation's local office, the Ambassador asked how the GOS might justify an eventual decision to recognize Kosovar independence. Demes replied "Slavic meta-physics," and predicted that in 3-5 months the government would announce that it had concluded that it was in the best interests of the EU, Serbia, and Slovakia that Kosovo's independence be recognized. This is, in effect, the scenario that FM Kubis has sketched to USG officials on multiple occasions, though he has been careful to state that he would need to convince a reluctant PM Fico. Although PM Fico's rhetoric could make a course correction more difficult, Post still considers Slovak recognition to be the likely, eventual outcome as if other EU holdouts move in that direction and the situation on the ground stabilizes. According to UK DCM, with whom A/DCM met on February 25, this assessment is shared also by the UK Embassy here. Given Fico's foreign policy orientation, however, it appears that key EU member states may be in the best position to convince Fico that it is in his interest that Slovakia recognize Kosovo. End Comment.

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